Small Goals are Better than No Goals: An Hour for Museum Educators to Plan for Evaluation & Reflection Before the Madness Begins

Elisabeth Nevins | Seed Education Consulting
What this session IS

• Brainstorming process for planning an evaluation
• Reminder of things to keep in mind when making plans
• Opportunity to set evaluation goals for the coming year

What this session IS NOT

• Evaluation 101
Session structure

- Identify a program (something) to focus on
- 4-Step Brainstorm @ 8 minutes each
  - 4 minute discussion of considerations
  - 4 minutes for brainstorming
- Reality Check!
  - 1 minute prompt response
    (type in comments box)
- Next steps/goal setting
- Questions
Defining the Scope of Your Evaluation
Elizabeth Wood

The Ethics of Evaluation in Museums
Joe E. Heimlich

Data Collection Methods for Evaluating Museum Programs and Exhibitions
Amy Grack Nelson & Sarah Cohn

www.museumedu.org/join
Find your focus

- program/ming (school, family, public)
- people (staff, per diems, volunteers)
- exhibit
- personal practice

Identify your audience

- funder (potential & actual)
- internal (department)
- internal (institution)
- self
(1) Questions

What do you (or your audience) want to know?

- key step in the process
- need not be holistic; can focus on part of a whole

Evaluation questions can:

- **describe** an experience
- **compare** what is happening in reality with intended goals
- explore **cause and effect** to identify what actions result in what outcomes
Reality Check! ASSESS

- what kinds of evaluation are you already doing?
- are you using this data to inform your work?
- can any of your questions be answered using data already being collected?
- do current evaluation tools need revision or retirement?

PROMPT
How much time do you think you currently spend engaged in evaluation-focused tasks tied to your job responsibilities? What about reflective practice?
(2) Evidence
What evidence/data might you need to collect to answer your question/s?

• more focused the question/s, the more obvious this is
• if your program or exhibit has specific learning outcomes, how does this learning manifest itself?
• if you advertise your programs as interactive, how to you quantify these types of interactions?
Reality Check! RESOURCES

- balancing ambition and practicality
- get your feet wet, start small, test ideas
- evaluation is more than collecting data
- find funding for an outside evaluator

PROMPT

How open are you and/or your staff to taking risks and testing new ideas when it comes to engaging visitors in evaluation activities? Leadership at your institution?
(3) **Tools**

What tools do you create to collect this data?

- survey, focus group, interview
- observation, documenting conversations
- web analytics, participant data, artifact review
- comment boards, in-gallery prompts, hands-on activity
- journaling

- might be a combination of more than 1 tool
- be playful/creative
Reality Check! ETHICS

What participants should know:
• the purpose of the evaluation
• time & effort required
• possible risks
• how information will be used/shared
• respect participants’ time, expectations, privacy
• consider developing a museum code of ethics

PROMPT
Based on your brainstorming thus far, are there any ethical considerations you feel you need to keep in mind as you develop your evaluation protocol?
(4) Application
How will you use the data after it is collected?

- plan time for analysis into your process
- have uses for information in mind—but expect those ideas to evolve
- reporting, program revision
- advocacy (internal & external)
Next steps

• generate a list of 3 things you need to do to move your plan toward action

Goal setting

• set 2 goals related to evaluation and reflection for the coming year—for yourself, your team, your institution
• think big! then break them down into manageable chunks
Questions?

PROMPT

Share one word that describes how you feel after participating in this webinar.
Share one word that describes how you are feeling about the upcoming school year.
Additional resources

nemanet.org/conference-events/lunch-nema

• archived webinar
• evaluation brainstorm graphic organizer
• resource list
• ethics in museum evaluation reader guide from museum education roundtable
• insights from prompt responses
Happy evaluating!

Elisabeth Nevins
Seed Education Consulting | EdPAG Co-Chair
enevins@seed-ed.com